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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

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U. S. Department of Agriculture

Subject: "The Food Market at Bethesda, Maryland." Facts from article in "Consumers' Guide" for February 9, 1934. Approved by Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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If you should travel on the road that leads north from Washington, D. C., to Bethesda, Maryland, any Wednesday or Saturday, you'd more than likely find yourself in a heavy line of traffic. You might recognize cars from the various embassies, perhaps a White House car.

Where are they going? To market. To the market at Bethesda, to buy hams, cooked and uncooked, baked beans, home-canned fruits and vegetables, chicken and sausage meat, salads and delicious pies and cakes and cinnamon rolls.

Bethesda is the home of the Montgomery Farm Women's Cooperative Market. Eighty-six women have stands there, in a model market building, where they sell the foods they have raised themselves, and have cooked in their own sanitary home kitchens. During the last year, the market brought in \$100,000. But I'm getting ahead of my story.

When the market was started, the county's farms were in a desperate plight. Something had to be done if the children were to stay in school, if farms and herds were to be saved, homes repaired, medical care provided.

As everybody knows, the home-cooked food of Maryland has long been celebrated in song and story. But even if the women of Maryland could cook better than anybody else within miles around, how were they to exchange their wares for money? How could they get their products to the public?

One of the first obstacles was overcome in 1932 by an ambitious field worker of the Extension Service of the University of Maryland. She helped put over the idea of cooperation, working through the women of the Home Demonstration Clubs. So the market started, with 70 women in a small store, making a start at profits, beginning to attract attention with their delicious food.

Through reorganization, part of the original group emerged as the Montgomery County Farm Women's Cooperative Market. They leased a model market building on the highway -- a market with glass-enclosed stands, electric refrigeration, modern equipment, and parking space outside.

There are rules, of course. No business that brings in \$100,000 in 12 months could get along without a few rules, and an efficient business manager. The business manager of the Bethesda market has charge of all details of routine, the purchase of supplies, care of building and grounds, and so on.

Eighty-six women are now members of the Cooperative market -- there's not a man employed in any capacity at all. Every woman must be an active member of a Home Demonstration Club, must own at least 6 acres of land, and must depend for most of her living on the land.

The foods they sell are fresh and appetizing. In fact, I've heard of shoppers who came home from the Bethesda market with their cars so full of fresh vegetables, sausage meat, chicken in aspic, cartons of salad and cottage cheese, home-made rolls -- so much food, in fact, that there was hardly room for the passengers.

Some of the Maryland women make specialties from recipes that have been in their families for generations. They sell their favorite pickles and preserves, they stuff chickens in a way of their own, they baste their roasts with a sauce that tastes better than anybody else's.

On market day, the women behind the stands wear white dresses and white caps. That's one of the market regulations. Food is their principal stock-in-trade, but they also sell cord wood, pedigreed cats and dogs and rabbits, garden flowers, and needlework.

Now about finances. (Women are always interested in finding out how projects of this kind are financed.) Each member of the market pays a rent of \$1 a month, gives back 5 per cent commission on her gross sales, and buys two shares of common stock which has voting power while she is actively selling¹ the market. In return for this fraction of her income she has the outlet for products which might otherwise bring in nothing, and she can buy supplies at the quantity prices the Business Manager buys them for.

Each year, more and more women are eager to add to family incomes by selling home-made foods. A number of small markets have been established recently in New York State. Mrs. Martha H. Eddy, of the New York State College of Home Economics, offers a few hints for continued success: "Have a steady supply of goods so that customers need never be disappointed," she says. "Offer no product for sale unless it is perfect; and find markets near home to save labor and transportation costs."

In counties without markets, according to Mrs. Eddy, many women have added to their incomes by sales to friends, or through local shops on a commission basis. Jellies, jams, cakes, and bread have been sold in this way. One woman has sold 150 dozen doughnuts during the past few months; two others saved their homes by selling hooked and hand-blocked articles; another caned 150 chairs for neighbors. Still another woman of New York State has opened up a shop in a barn, where she reconditions furniture, and makes slip covers. Others have remodeled garments, have canned fruits and vegetables, and have washed and sized rugs for less skillful neighbors who could pay for the service.

Farm women's markets have proved a good thing for many farm women who needed to add to the cash income for the education of the children, or some other worthy goal.

